

Premier Gordon Campbell
Address to the Canadian Automobile Dealers Association
June 1, 2003

Check Against Delivery

As our government looks at our province's exceptional assets and people, one of our biggest challenges is putting the talents, abilities, entrepreneurial drive and excitement of British Columbians to work for our province.

Back in June 2001, when our government was sworn in, we faced many issues.

One was a need for accountability within government. So, for the first time in our province's history, we set out three-year, rolling plans for every ministry, with defined measures of success.

Another issue was to reinvent and reinvigorate the private sector.

We are a free-enterprise government. We believe in private creativity, in people taking risks, and we want to celebrate their successes, not detract from or confiscate them.

That was a big change in our province. And we've faced many more.

We faced 9/11, the softwood lumber challenge, SARS and the war in Iraq. And the next little while is going to be difficult.

Our generation is not as good at change, particularly in government, as it could be. But if we don't change the way we think, if we don't learn from the world around us how to deliver services effectively to the people we serve, we are going to fail them and watch our province decline.

We don't want to see that happen. We're striving to deliver services to people in a more cost-effective way, despite resistance from the status quo. And we're responding, as we must, to demographic changes.

Look at the person next to you. Honestly, how many of us look younger this year than last?

We're all aging and we have to change the way we deliver services, to respond to the needs of an aging population and the pressures it puts on our systems – particularly health care.

Our government has faced other cost pressures and tough decisions that have nothing to do with demographics.

I don't know if you've every heard of Skeena Cellulose. The previous government decided that they would take it over and, as a result, they lost taxpayers \$400 million.

I would far prefer that we leave those types of acquisitions and mergers to people in the private sector, because they are immediately, directly accountable for every decision they make.

We're striving for greater accountability in British Columbia. When we brought in our balanced budget legislation and budget transparency law, we told cabinet ministers to earn back their cabinet stipend.

We took away 20 per cent of it and said 10 per cent depends on our government's performance as a team. In your ministry, you can earn back the other 10 per cent if you ensure your ministry hits its budget target.

That focused ministers' agendas. When you can focus personal accountability throughout the government's ranks, you start to make change that's positive, constructive and gets you where you want to go.

After just one complete budget cycle in British Columbia, for the first time in 50 years, every single ministry of government came in on or below budget. We're proud of that performance measure.

Government isn't about regulations; it's about trying to create services. One of the most important partnerships we've had with your industry is with the B.C. Automobile Association.

I needed to know about the challenges you face, whether they related to employment standards or labour laws, industry training or regulatory burdens. The B.C. Automobile Association said there were a number of things government needed to do if your industry was going to stay competitive.

Canada has 3,500 automobile dealerships and 115,000 people at work. No industry in this country contributes more of our gross domestic product than the automobile industry and related industries.

That's phenomenal – yet, in a recent survey, only 10 per cent of those surveyed said they wanted to get involved in your industry. I don't want to be the bearer of bad news, but politicians are at about that level.

Clearly, both our vocations need to draw talented people in the future.

From my perspective, if we're not willing to reinforce and reinvigorate public life in this country, we're in danger of losing something incredibly important and valuable that we inherited from our parents and previous generations: the right to vote.

One of my jobs and my colleagues' jobs is to try and improve people's opinions about what politics is about and what public life and public service is about. Similarly, one of your tasks is to remind people of the contributions you make every day and every week to your communities.

They are myriad. You are the first place your communities come to – to sponsor little league teams, to make sure a youth orchestra can go on tour and to sponsor civic projects.

You're always there, with 3,500 dealers across the country. I think 340 dealers are from British Columbia alone, and each one of you is critical to the social and economic fabric of your community.

We have to continue to reinforce that and be proud of what you do in your community, just as we have to be proud of what we do in our public life if we're going to build the foundation we need for the future.

Since taking office, we've brought in 27 tax-relief measures. We've done that for one reason: to liberate people to pursue their own goals. We want people in small business to know that in British Columbia, we want small businesses to become big businesses.

Every government has had a small business policy. I personally felt that the last government in British Columbia had an approach that differed from ours.

They thought you should start the decade with a big business and, if you had a small business by the end of the decade, that was okay. We have another approach: we'd like the small guys to grow.

To do that, we increased the threshold for the small business tax by 50 per cent, to \$300,000 a year from \$200,000. We had a dramatic personal income tax cut across the board in British Columbia, almost 25 per cent.

There is no question that if you leave more money in people's pockets, they will spend it more wisely than government will.

We make different decisions for ourselves than we do when we sit in government, as a larger institution for the whole province. It's just the way it works.

So, what has happened in B.C. since the dramatic personal income tax cut in 2001?

In 2002, B.C. had the fastest-growing average weekly wages in the country, at three times the national average. That's money people invest in automobiles and other retail items as they see fit.

I'd be less than honest if I didn't tell you some people question that. I understand that questioning. It's healthy, because it makes us really examine our values and the principles we bring to the table as government.

As average weekly paycheques went up this year, investments intentions in British Columbia climbed to number two in the country. Three years ago, we were number 10.

Our goal is to be number 1, and we're going to get there.

If each province is allowed to pursue its agenda and objectives openly, we will be strengthened as a country, because we can learn from each other.

As an example, we've listened to your industry and seen what other provinces are doing. As a result, we'll be moving to a new Motor Vehicle Act with a self-regulatory agency.

We're going to trust the automobile industry to know what's best for itself, because it's in your interest and the public's interest to do that.

We're going to have a new consumer transaction agency in place. The legislation will be in place this fall, so that by January 1, there will be a delegated administrative authority to the automobile dealers in this province.

This will ensure our automobile legislation and regulatory codes are flexible yet protect the public interest.

It was 1941 when government started applying regulatory codes to the auto industry. When we were elected to government, we said we would cut one-third of all regulation affecting business within our first three years.

Meeting this goal meant, first of all, that we had to find out how many regulations the province imposes on business. I was staggered by the number: a little over 400,000 regulations.

There isn't a regulation that someone doesn't love. So, when we change regulations, we have to be clear that what we're doing is responding to our values – like safety and health.

After one year of focused work, we have eliminated over 50,000 regulations in British Columbia.

With two years to go, we're ahead of schedule – but we need your help in identifying regulations that make no sense.

What are the regulations that get in your way? That just cost you and load you down as a private-sector enterprise? And what regulations do make sense?

We need open, direct dialogue to get the answers. I'm very lucky – I have some long-time friends in your industry.

They can tell me when we're doing things that make no sense. They're not afraid of doing that. If we're really going to create a service partnership, we have to open up and have people be straightforward.

For our Workers' Compensation Board, which has 35,000 regulations, and for our Employment Standards Act, which has 10,000 regulations, which ones make sense and which ones don't?

We're changing those dramatically, and we're going to carry on, sector by sector, to make sure our government policies are flexible, appropriate and responsive to change.

I have a team, my cabinet and caucus, who are dedicated to improvement every day, every week, every month, every session, every year.

What we're trying to do is think about not just next year, but what we want British Columbia to look like ten years from now.

I'd like you to feel you have a government that's responsive to your needs and your concerns. I'd like you to feel you have a government that's open and direct with you. When we can't do something, we should say so, and why.

The Canadian Automobile Dealers Association is working right now with Natural Resource Canada to build a partnership. We recognize, as you do, that Canada needs a solid, environmentally sensible transportation system.

The Trans Canada Highway system really got started because of your association and the commitment of your members to improving our transportation system across the country.

One of the most important unifiers our country has is open, easy access to goods and services and people. We can't continue to allow our transportation infrastructure across Canada to deteriorate.

Our generation inherited that infrastructure from our parents – and although it's difficult, we're going to reinvest now and pay as we go, so we can create the kind of future for our children that we inherited from our parents.

Part of our future is connected directly to one of your primary charities, the Paralympics. As you know, you are the largest single contributor to the Paralympics in Canada.

It's something you should take great pride in. Some of the best Paralympians in the world are Canadian, thanks in part to your investment and commitment to our athletes.

We are striving to win the bid for the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games. In B.C., we look at the Games as more than just thousands of new jobs and billions of additional dollars in our economy, although both of those things will matter.

The Olympic Games represent an opportunity to remind people that British Columbia is a proud province that wants to contribute to Canada in a way that's positive.

For young people in British Columbia and across the country, we want to win the 2010 Games. They will remind us of what we can accomplish when we dig deep inside ourselves, and when we work together as a community, a province and a country to help individuals reach a higher level.

My colleagues and I look forward to helping to create a series of gold-medal performers. They'll set examples for young people to see what you can do when you dedicate yourself with discipline and commitment.

It's the same discipline and commitment each of you show every day when you make sure your enterprises work for the people in your communities.

When we strive for what's best in ourselves, reinforce what's best in one another and think about what is best for our province and our country, we are a light that other countries will follow.

We are a beacon of hope that other countries will look to – one that shines in a young child's eyes as they dream a dream bigger than themselves, reach for it and accomplish it.

That spirit is ultimately part of what we want to give the next generation of British Columbians and Canadians.

We want to pass on the kind of country we inherited from our parents – one that's improved, offers hope and allows people to pursue their dreams in a way that is second to none.